

# HOW DO WE GET THERE?

- Action Plans

# ACTION PLANS

Action plans make up the "How do we get there?" part of the strategic planning process.

**Action plan:** a detailed description of the strategies and steps used to implement a strategic plan.

Action plans spell out the details of the methods, or strategies, that will be used to accomplish the objectives, goals and missions of the agency and its programs and subprograms. Tasks and responsibilities are outlined in SMART (specific, measurable, aggressive/attainable, result-oriented and time-bound) steps. Action plans should contain as much detail as each level of management feels is important. The employees, or individual, responsible for implementing and reporting each objective will need the most detail. However, upper management may only want to know that the objective is being implemented on schedule and not want to know the status of each step.

Planning assumptions are often included. Planning assumptions clarify expectations about future conditions upon which the strategic plan is based. If these conditions significantly change, planning assumptions and, possibly, the strategic plan may need to be amended. This part of the process builds upon past experience, current activities and projected trends, which could significantly impact future performance.

|                                      |  |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| E<br>X<br>A<br>M<br>P<br>L<br>E<br>S | Sample planning assumptions for a social service agency:   |
|                                      | • <u>Demographic</u> : The demand for services will continue to grow based on the state's population growth, changes in the family structure, and aging of the population. |
|                                      | • <u>Economic</u> : Due to the improving economy, unemployment will continue to decrease, creating a lower demand for the Job Training program and placement services.     |
|                                      | • <u>Government/Legislative</u> : Welfare reform will be enacted.  |

The planning assumptions help the planning team chose the relevant strategies for implementing objectives.

## Formulating Strategies

In order to build an action plan, managers, supervisors and other key staff members must determine how to achieve the desired results. The costs, benefits and possible consequences of alternative courses of action, or strategies, must be evaluated. The most effective and efficient strategies should be selected. Researching successful programs in other State agencies, both local and out of state, can prove helpful. Private-sector organizations are also a good source of information.

Looking at other units or sections within the agency can prove fruitful. You may find similar goals, objectives and procedures that can be borrowed. Also, fellow staff members may have experience or knowledge that can be utilized.



Team Effort

Conducted properly, brainstorming can be one of the most effective ways to generate and encourage innovative ideas. Bringing in key players to discuss possible strategies will strengthen and identify opportunities for coordination and cooperation. The team should include all staff who will have responsibility for accomplishing the objectives.

Before a decision is made regarding the course of action that will be taken, each strategy must be weighed. The following questions can be used as a test of each suggested alternative.

- If this course of action is implemented, is it plausible that the objective will be reached?
- What are the anticipated costs and benefits of this course of action?
- Will this course of action have a positive or negative impact on any other objectives?
- Is this objective dependent upon the successful implementation of any other objective?
- Is the agency organized to implement this course of action? If not, what must be changed to accommodate implementation?
- If changes are necessary, how long will they take? Are there other constraints that will occur as a result?
- Once implemented, will procedural changes be required? If so, what impact will they have on the agency?
- What are the steps necessary to implement this course of action and how long will each step take?

The resources that will be needed to implement various strategies must also be considered. **Resource Allocation:** the determination and allotment of resources or assets necessary to carry out strategies and achieve objectives, within a priority framework. To avoid creating unrealistic expectations, planning decisions must be grounded in fiscal reality. The emphasis on efficient agency operations and results-oriented management also means that, regardless of the current political and economic climate, all agencies should plan under the general assumption that future funds will be limited. Budget units should consider service delivery alternatives, processes that leverage existing resources, or resource redeployment before requesting budget increases.

The following questions can be used to test the resource needs of each strategy.

- Are the resources required to implement this course of action--the budget, personnel, training, facilities, hardware, software and other equipment available? If not, how will needed resources be obtained? Can resources be reallocated within the agency?
- If information resources (hardware, software, etc.) will be required, will these needs be reflected in the annual Information Technology (IT) plan?
- What will the fiscal impact of this course of action be? Will additional funding be needed? Will implementation require that a decision package be submitted with the next budget?

Once the costs, benefits, possible constraints, time frames and resources have been analyzed, select the best strategy. Next, identify the steps necessary to successfully implement the strategy in order to achieve the objective. These are the action steps that will appear in the action plan.

### **Putting the Action Plan Together**

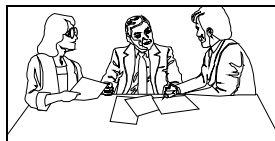
The action plan is the level where the actual production of a program occurs. Action plans are geared toward operations, procedures and processes. The action plan describes who performs each step and when the step is scheduled for completion.

The following process is one way of managing the action plan.

#### **1. Assign responsibility for implementation of the action plan.**

- Who is in charge of implementing all steps of the action plan?
- Who will be accountable?

#### **2. Detail the action plan in steps.**



- The individual or team responsible for completion of the action plan should define the steps that must be finished in order to fully complete the action plan.
- Steps should be briefly described, indicate who is responsible for completion of the step, and have an expected start date and finish date.

**3. Set a time frame for completion of the action plan.**

- In the overall context of the strategy, when should the action plan as a whole be completed?
- Does the person or team responsible for the action plan think it can be completed within the desired time?
- Is the time frame for the action plan as a whole consistent with individual time frames projected for steps within the action plan? If not, how can differences be reconciled?

**4. Determine the fiscal impact of the action plan and the resources necessary to carry it out.**

- The individual or team responsible for completion of the action plan should determine the fiscal impact and identify the resources necessary to carry out the plan.
- The action plan becomes the basis for developing requests for capital and operating budgets, as well as to support human and information resource management.
- In practice, it may be necessary to detail the steps of the action plan—including intermediate dates—before the time frame for the action plan as a whole is set.

**Organizing the Action Plan**

A numbering or lettering system is recommended for ease in identifying each particular goal, objective and action step. A typical method for organizing a strategic plan is to devise a numbering system. For example:

- Goals could be numbered: 1, 2, 3, etc.
- Objectives could be numbered to correspond to each goal: 1.1 or 1-1 would represent the first objective under the first goal.
- Finally, action steps could be numbered to identify which goal and objective they are under: 1.1.2 or 1-1-2 would be the second step required under the first objective, first goal.
- The numbering system does not necessarily have to represent the importance of the goal or objective, unless the agency has decided to prioritize elements of the plan.
- Since much of the information included in the action plan will also be used for the tracking and monitoring document, agencies may want to design one format to accomplish both purposes.

Sample action plans are provided on the following pages.

*Hint: The Litmus Test in the Forms section of this Handbook can be used to evaluate Action Plans.*

## SAMPLE FORMAT FOR ACTION PLAN

PROGRAM \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

**Goal:**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Objective:**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Strategy:**

\_\_\_\_\_

| Action Steps | Persons Responsible | Due Date or Time Line | Resources Needed |
|--------------|---------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
|              |                     |                       |                  |
|              |                     |                       |                  |
|              |                     |                       |                  |
|              |                     |                       |                  |
|              |                     |                       |                  |

## SAMPLE ACTION PLAN

**PROGRAM: AFDC**

**DATE: FY 1998**

| <p><b>Goal:</b> To provide accurate and timely benefits to all customers.</p> <p><b>Objective:</b> By June 30, 2000, process 99.7% of AFDC applications within 45 days of receipt in office.</p> <p><b>Strategy:</b> Target specific offices with accuracy and/or timeliness problems.</p> |  |                         |  |
|--|--|-------------------------|--|
| Action Steps   | Persons Responsible  | Due Dates or Time Table | Resources Needed                                 |
| 1) Identify barriers to processing applications:<br>A. Program Barriers<br>B. Client Barriers.   | Program Administrator, QA Manager, Eligibility Determination Staff | July 1 to November      | Work group, QA staff, ED staff, and Policy staff |
| 2) Review quality assurance reports to identify offices.   | Work group leader  | November to January     | Data for each local office                       |
| 3) Develop solutions to timeliness issue, including resources, FTEs and cost-benefit analysis.   | Work group and Program Managers for X, Y & Z offices               | January to March        |  |
| 4) Institute solutions developed by designated personnel.  | Program Administrators and Program Managers                        | March to June           | Detailed Policy and Procedures                   |